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Full Length Research Paper

Education Policy-Making – Wither the State as Policy Actor

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The development of education policy internationally, reflected in Education for All and the Millennium Development Goals, provides examples of policy convergence at national levels. Yet the process of such convergence largely remains unexplored. Using the case study of a developing African county, this article seeks to explore ways in which policy convergence may occur. This article suggests that the paucity of national policy-making capacity in developing countries and the weakness of local policy actors results in policy space being penetrated by external policy actors as agents of policy transfer. The transfer of policy may be subject to varying degrees of voluntarism and coercion. This article concludes that ministries of education in developing countries are often marginalised in actual policy development. This may result in lack of policy commitment at national level. It may also result in policy failure due to lack of policy fit.

Keywords: Public policy-making; education; international development; Lesotho

INTRODUCTION

Theoretical approaches to public policy-making insufficiently acknowledge the conditions and processes under which public policy-making occurs in developing countries, and are temporally and spatially hidebound. They posit concepts and constructs emanating from particular institutional, social and political systems in developed countries, which are often far removed from the policy contexts of developing countries. There are few instances where the literature on public policy-making acknowledges that developing countries have particular characteristics which differentiate them from developed countries in their policy-making capacities and processes. Where these are indicated, they are not sufficiently elaborated (Cloete, 2000). Theoretical approaches to policy-making take little account of the permeability of the state in developing countries to international influences, including external policy actors.

Hence, theoretical perspectives on policy-making tend to purvey a misplaced static universalism and are not cognisant of the structural relationships and policy dynamics between international governing organisations (IGOs) and developing countries. The extent to which developing countries are able to successfully pursue their own policy-making is circumscribed by critical external and domestic factors. Where the level of analysis in policy-making theorising has been the state, the hollowing-out of the state due to impacts of aid, globalisation, the New Public Management (NPM) and the New Policy Agenda (NPA) are often unacknowledged. The hollowed-out state is particularly susceptible to policy transfer, yet the content and processes of transfer remain largely unexplored. This paper attempts to identify some of those processes in the context of a developing African country.

The following section examines aspects of the hollowing-out of the state, followed by a description of the policy context of Lesotho. Issues in policy transfer are then examined and conclusions drawn.

HOLLOWING-OUT OF THE STATE

This section examines four aspects of the hollowing-out of the state, namely the impacts of aid, globalisation, NPM and NPA.

Impacts of Aid

The legacy of colonialism in many countries left under-developed and weak systems of governance unable to resist international pressures, and fostering a dependency on Official Development Assistance (ODA). Donors have policy leverage through the disbursement of funds, exacerbated by the move away from discrete programmatic interventions to coordinated sector-wide approaches and general budget support. In this respect, the fulcrum of policy-making is inclined to move outside the domestic policy-making arena to external policy actors.

International Financial Institutions (IFIs), comprising the World Bank (WB) and International Monetary Fund, have been particularly instrumental in shaping macroeconomic and other policies in developing countries. This has often been premised on conditionalities related to policy-based lending, from Structural Adjustment Programmes to WB-sponsored poverty reduction strategies in various guises. Regional derivatives of the WB, such as the African Development Bank also act as policy-based lending conduits. The similarity of policy-based lending to different countries has been such that Craig and Porter (2002:56) argue:

"Washington Consensus settings offered IFIs a universal technical toolbox out of which local solutions could be fairly routinely applied..."

Adar and Ajulu (2002:5) suggest that the use of aid to impose policy compliance or punish non-compliance became the "*sine qua non"* of IFIs. The impact of IFIs goes far beyond the disbursement of funds and includes influence over public policy-making, to the extent that it may have spawned a neo-colonial policy dependence. Indeed, Osagahae (1994) argues that Africa has been subject to enforced policy paradigms by the IFIs, which have virtually taken over policy-making in African states. Nabudere (2000:41) suggests that the emphasis on political conditionalities is an invidious attempt by IFIs to exert greater control over Africa as a "supranational authority", in order to oversee the politics as well as the economics of developing countries.

Increasingly, poverty reduction strategies have not been confined to macroeconomic management drawn from the antecedents of the Washington Consensus, but have included social sector interventions such as education. The universal consensus on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) provides a ready-made template for policy goals in social sectors and extensions of policy-based aid. In supporting MDGs there is an impetus for donors to either piggyback on expansive poverty reduction strategies as a substitute for an overall national development policy, or pressurise recipient countries to insert education targets as part of poverty reduction strategies if they are not already included.

The multiplier influence of IFIs and poverty reduction includes transfer of integrated policy related to a broad range of social sectors (Walt, 2001), as well as economic and political governance. Consequently, penetration by IFIs and other donors is a consequence and cause of the hollowed-out state, insofar as donors are able to both occupy the policy space, and resist and supplant local policy-making capacity in a number of sectors. The policy convergence and policy transfer imposed on developing countries by IFIs is pervasive to the extent that Craig and Porter (2002:55) state:

"The emerging convergence in policies for poverty reduction we argue represents an attempt to generate a level of global to local integration... unprecedented since colonial times."

Poverty reduction strategies reflect the face of globalisation (Craig and Porter, 2002) in drawing states and localities into global governance structures. This is further discussed below.

Globalisation

Adar and Ajulu (2002) argue that globalisation has rendered the notion of the nation-state, with control over its territory and population as an autonomous actor, all but meaningless in the African context. Globalisation has resulted in national boundaries being subject to increasing external policy influence (Bache and Taylor, 2003), and has circumscribed, constrained and redefined the state's ability to manage its own affairs. This includes constraints on its "internal sovereignty", such as room for manoeuvre in public policy-making (Reinicke and Witte 1999 in Buse *et al*., 2002:253), which has encouraged policy transfer from developed countries to developing countries (McCourt, 2001).

Donors are inclined to borrow policies, so that one developing country and its policy problems appear much the same as another (Ferguson, 1990). This provides an underlying rationale for policy transfer between countries, the re-cycling of policies in the guise of policy-making and growing policy convergence, irrespective of the specific nature of policy problems and local policy contexts.

The growing loss of a state's control over its affairs through globalisation has tended to foster arrangements between national governments and IGOs, involving supranational bodies that operate on a regional or sub-regional basis (Common, 1998). Regionalism is in a sense a trade-off between a loss of national sovereignty and a preserved measure of subsidiarity, or a degree of residual national autonomy within broader supranational structures. Although regional and sub-regional groupings of states and bodies may emerge to pool collective interests and guard against globalisation, these arrangements may bring additional constraints on public policy-making. Regionalism is likely to be dominated by more powerful and influential member countries and organisations, and may not necessarily hedge against penetration by supranational institutions globally (Bache and Taylor, 2003).

New Public Management

Emerging from the neo-liberal discourse of Reaganism and Thatcherism and through transfer to certain Commonwealth countries and those of the Organisation of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), by the late 1900s NPM had been described as "a truly global paradigm" (Borins 1997 in McCourt, 2001:236). Consistent with the theme of "reinventing government" (Osborne and Gaebler 1992 in Minogue, 1998:18), under the aegis of the NPM the state is encouraged to change its role from "rowing to steering" (Jonker, 2001:253). This includes marketisation of service delivery including restructuring of the public sector through privatisation of state owned enterprises (SOEs), downsizing the civil service and decentralisation. Under the rubric of NPM, public service delivery is supposedly driven by customer demand, based on consumer choice in the marketplace of service providers. The culture, conditions and context of public service delivery is transformed, with marketisation and other mechanisms replacing the primacy of the state.

NPM encapsulates a network of arrangements, with public administration increasingly supplanted by executive agencies, taskforces, working groups, joint commissions and advisory groups (McGarvey, 2001). The change from public ownership, public subsidies and directly provided services has led to "a hollowing out of the state", with the loss of capability by governments to effectively control public policy-making (Gray 2000 in McGarvey, 2001:951). In this regard, NPM represents a shift from the values of public welfare and a civil service that facilitates service delivery by the state, to more selective, for-profit service delivery dominated by the private sector.

NPM has been keenly promote by donors (Turner and Hulme, 1997), often through their "strictures and conditionality" (Olowu, 2005: 10) Privatisation has undermined the state and strengthened elites, through what (Hibou, 1999:71) terms the "economy of plunder", that is "the acquisition, by the representatives of public authority, of economic resources for private purposes." NPM has invariably become a battleground for asset-stripping and national plunder that diverts attention and resources of the state.

The introduction of NPM has often been accompanied by strategies for decentralisation in its various forms, including political devolution, and administrative delegation and deconcentration. The level of global to local integration described by Craig and Porter (2002) above in reference to globalisation also extends to decentralisation, as a feature of NPM. For example, they argue that:

"Decentralised governance has likewise emerged as a focus and domain of technical, largely depoliticised accountabilities", (Craig and Porter, 2002:58).

Decentralisation ostensibly attempts to bring service delivery closer to local communities, with greater transparency and accountability. Although there may be some success stories, Craig and Porter (2002:65) suggest that there is abundant evidence of the "tyranny" effects of decentralisation. The battle for largesse between and within levels of governance has served to decentralise corruption and create bitter feuds between the centre and decentralised structures. By turning upon itself, the state is weakened by internal discord. The use of NGOs for alternative service delivery is also an aspect of decentralised service delivery, which is discussed below under NPA.

New Policy Agenda

Emerging at the time of the NPM and based on similar neo-liberal precepts, NPA was deemed to be able fill the void left by the hollowed-out state as a mechanism for development. NPA was considered as an "alternative development paradigm' (Zaidi, 1999:259) Donors became reluctant to disburse aid through discredited state bureaucracies, with NGOs displacing them as preferred conduits (Diklitch, 1998). Hence, they became important vehicles for service delivery as a deliberate substitution for the state (Edwards and Hulme, 1995). This has arguably give rise to a patron-client relationship between donors and NGOs, including north-based international NGOs that serve as funding conduits to their in-country offices and local partner organisations. Given the increasing involvement of NGOs in service delivery, a growing separation has tended to emerge between the state as responsible for policy and regulatory environment, and public service providers. A major consequence of this has been "to fragment the sovereignty of the state", (Hibou, 1999:95).

The increased role of NGOs may lead to an erosion of administrative and institutional capacity of the state. This erosion and fragmentation has been compounded by the huge proliferation of NGOs' attempts to work with depleted government ministries. Hibou (1999:99) suggests that NGOs; "represent simply the privatisation of funds for aid". Funding within the context of a 'contract culture' that fosters competition tends to enable donors to "buy" legitimacy for their own policy agendas in developing countries (Paul, 1996:1).

Policy Context of Lesotho

The policy context of Lesotho describes the geo-political and socio-economic environments, and its current education policy.

Geo-Political Environment

The Kingdom of Lesotho has a population of approximately 2 million people, and is roughly the size of Belgium. A former British Protectorate, it became independent in 1966. Much of its most fertile land, upon which many Basotho still rely for their livelihoods, was ceded in the nineteenth century to South Africa which completely surrounds the country.

Lesotho may be considered a small state (Commonwealth Secretariat, 2003; UNESCO, 1998). Small states are characterised by vulnerability in defence and security, limited human resources and lack of economic resources (Commonwealth Secretariat, 2003). They are also characterised by susceptibility to natural disasters, limited institutional capacity, lack of economic diversification, income volatility and poverty (Commonwealth Secretariat, 2003). Although smallness in itself does not necessarily result in a weak state, the particular interaction of such important factors as geography, demography and economy contributes to Lesotho's vulnerability.

The critical factor for Lesotho as a small state is that external factors play a predominant role in determining its survival and its economic and political options at the regional and global levels (Santho, 1998). These factors include economic dependency, asymmetrical relations with a dominant neighbour and geopolitical vulnerability due to its landlocked status (Santho, 1998). Consequently, Lesotho is susceptible to external shocks as diverse as unexpected fluctuations in the value of its currency and unanticipated weather conditions, and is highly vulnerable to their impacts. Small states are also susceptible to threats from internal as well as external sources. In Lesotho's case, threats have arisen because of weak state institutions and fragile political processes (Santho, 1998).

Lesotho is a member of the sub-regional bloc of the Southern African Development Community (SADC). It is also a member of the Common Monetary Area (CMA), comprising a small group of countries within SADC, which pegs its currency to the Loti at parity with the South African Rand. Through the CMA, the South African Reserve Bank controls interest rates, monetary policy and other aspects of fiscal and macroeconomic management to the extent that the Government of Lesotho's (GOL's) scope for independent action in these regards is negligible. The Southern African Customs Union, also dominated by South Africa, generates a considerable amount of Lesotho's public income based on the value of pooled customs revenues.

Since independence, the struggle for political power in Lesotho has arguably reflected and reinforced schisms within the country. Makoa (2004:75) has suggested that political developments in Lesotho have "boxed and sealed the Basotho nation into non-interactive and mutually antagonistic blocs." The alleged inappropriateness of the Westminster-style electoral model arguably caused periodic post-general election military interventions and civil unrest since independence, until the introduction of proportional representation in 2002. Although the last two elections occurred in the absence of violence the litmus test for political stability in the country is broad-based acceptance of the new electoral model and its parliamentary outcomes. Such acceptance has recently been severely challenged, with the then Prime Minister suspending Parliament in 2014 in the wake of an attempted no-confidence motion by the Opposition, and himself fleeing the country in fear of his life amid schisms in political allegiances and shootings between the army and police. Mediation by South Africa resulted in a General Election in 2015 and a change of Government.

Following local elections in 2005 after a dormant period lasting decades, the public service and the structures of governance have been subject to an on-going strategy of decentralisation. This was primarily funded by Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) through a 12-year programme, and is currently being funded by the European Union (EU) and the United Nations (UN) (Lesotho Times, 31 January - 6 February 2013:11). Kreditanstalt für Wiederaufbau (KFW), the German development bank, is also providing support.

The United Kingdom (UK) Department for International Development (DFID) has funded an extensive programme of civil service reform, with the objective to improve public service management, public expenditure management and accountability (Floyd, 2003). GOL has pledged to address corrupt practices in order to promote public accountability and transparency (GOL, 2003). However, it is arguable whether there has been sufficient political will to develop and implement a new vision for the civil service and its relationships with other branches of government and civil society.

Socio-Economic Environment

Lesotho is ranked 158 out of 186 countries in the 2014 Human Development Report, with a Gross National Income (GNI) per capita of less than 3,000 United States Dollars (USD) (UNDP, 2014). Resources are concentrated amongst a small proportion of the population, resulting in large inequalities in wealth. In 2010, total aid disbursement from donors was 243 million USD (OECD, 2011), amounting to approximately 10% of GNI and a quarter of the Government's budget. Almost 40% of aid is channeled through the country's own public financial systems. However, ODA excludes donor funding provided through NGOs of which there are a considerable number, both international and local, in Lesotho. The five largest donors to Lesotho are the United States, WB, Ireland, the EU and the Global Fund for Aids, Tuberculosis and Malaria, which collectively account for almost two-thirds of ODA. These donors, coupled with the UN, UK, African Development Bank, Germany, Japan and the International Fund for Agriculture and Development provide over 80% of ODA. Individual countries invariably use their respective international development agencies to promote policy dialogue, champion particular policy agendas and provide funds, such as the United States Agency for International Development, DFID, Irish Aid, GIZ and the Japan International Cooperation Agency.

The 2010 World Bank Poverty Assessment (in MOFDP, 2011) states that 37% of the population live on 1 USD per day or less, with 41% of the population in rural areas and 25% in urban areas. Unemployment is officially almost a quarter of the workforce (2008 Labour Force Survey 2008 in MOFDP, 2011). However, this figure disguises under-employment, and many relying upon unpaid subsistence agricultural activity the productivity of which and contribution to GNI has sharply declined in recent years. HIV prevalence is almost a quarter of the adult population, the third highest in the world. (Lesotho Demographic and Health Survey 2009 in MOFDP, 2011).

Under the auspices of IFIs, Lesotho introduced a Structural Adjustment Programme in 1988. The neoliberal economic strategy including the emphasis on privatisation and foreign direct investment was continued through the Interim Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper, the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper, and the Poverty Reduction Strategy developed with funding from the WB and technically supported by Irish Aid, DFID and the EU, and including local and international consultants. The Poverty Reduction Strategy was superseded by the Interim National Development Framework and the current National Strategic Development Plan (GOL, 2012), the development of which is funded by Irish Aid, EU and the UN, and which broadly continues the same initial macroeconomic approach. Lesotho's privatisation programme was introduced in 1996. The Lesotho Utilities Reform Project with funding from WB, the African Development Bank and EU, was introduced in 2001 to privatise water services, electricity, telecommunications and other public utilities. The Agricultural Sector Adjustment Programme/Agriculture Policy and Capacity Building Project, launched in 2002 privatised SOEs in the agriculture sector. Not dissimilar to many other countries, privatisation in Lesotho has been criticised for leading to increased foreign ownership of former national economic assets, compromising the country's long-term economic prospects (Mahasoa, 1999).

Lesotho's economy remains heavily reliant upon South Africa. A large amount of Lesotho's services and commerce are owned by South African companies, including much of the electricity supply, virtually the entire banking and financial services sector, large commercial retailing, international hotels, the air line, and mining (Work for Justice, 2005). All of Lesotho's water exports, arising from the Lesotho Highlands Water Project partially funded through the WB, are made to South Africa. Although having declined in the last decade, remittances from South Africa by approximately 40,000 Basotho mineworkers still provide a sizeable contribution to many households' income and Lesotho's GNI. Lesotho's largest source of employment in the formal sector is the export-based textile industry, which as with a number of other African countries, was spawned under the Clinton Administration's US African Growth and Opportunity Act. It is primarily controlled by Asian transnational corporations employing mainly low-paid female labour.

Education Policy

The WB has been instrumental in funding the country's education sector reform. In 2000, GOL introduced the progressive phasing-out of school fees for primary education, through its policy of introducing Free Primary Education (FPE). Lesotho's Poverty Reduction Strategy committed GOL to increasing the quality, accessibility and responsiveness of the education system as a whole (GOL, 2004b) The Poverty Reduction Strategy also committed GOL to extending FPE to Universal Basic Education UBE, that is non-fee education up to and including junior secondary level (GOL, 2004b).

The Ministry of Education and Training's (MOET's) Education Sector Strategic Plan (ESSP) 2005 – 2015 (MOET, 2005) is GOL's de facto current education policy. Several consultants made their inputs in the preparation of the document and donors were invited to make contributions. A 2004 Donor Coordination Conference was held to provide further inputs. The ESSP specifically states that it has taken into consideration Education for All (EFA) goals, the MDGs, and other international and regional conventions, treaties, protocols agreements and declarations (MOET, 2005). Consistent with this consideration, the five strategic outputs of the ESSP are access, equity, quality, efficiency and relevance (MOET, 2005). These are reflected in the following ESSP objectives:

- To improve access, efficiency and equity of education and training at all levels
- To improve the quality of education and training
- To progressively achieve the equivalence, harmonisation and standardisation of the education and training systems nationally, regionally and internationally
- To promote gender equity and ensure empowerment of disadvantaged groups
- To address the challenges posed by HIV and AIDS in education and training

Lesotho's education policy education statements contained in the Poverty Reduction Strategy and the ESSP reflect those contained in both regional and broader international policy instruments. They are consistent with Article 4 of the 1997 SADC Protocol on Education and Training, whereby member states have agreed to widen provision and access to education. They are concomitant with the objective of the New Programme for Africa's Development Human Resource Development Initiative, to expand access to secondary education. They reflect the 1990 Jomtien World Declaration on Education for All, reiterated at the 2000 World Education Forum in Dakar to commit governments to achieve the MDG of UPE by 2015, and the Regional Framework for Action. The policy statements further reflect the 2002 UN Special Session of the General Assembly on Children articulated in a World Fit for Children, which reaffirms governments' commitments to the provision of free access to basic quality education, as enshrined in the MDGs. The policy statements also acknowledge the international context of the development of education systems, as well as Lesotho's domestic and regional challenges regarding HIV and AIDS.

However, there are two constraints facing the implementation of Lesotho's education policy. First, is the lack of capacity. This is particularly critical given the emphasis ESSP has on decentralisation, where governance is particularly weak, and which ESSP regards as a "strategic focus" (MOET, 2005:28). It is proposed that a taskforce be established to develop an education decentralisation policy (MOET, 2005), including districts to handle finance, and school boards and committees for planning and expenditure management. However, the Ministry of Finance and Development Planning (MOFDP) (2011:131) states that although Lesotho has a wide range of polices:

"...trade-offs between policies are not explicitly analysed, action plans are not linked to realistic assessment of available implementation capacity and the resource envelope and it is not easy to assess their implementation status."

The second constraint to education policy implementation, foreshadowed in the aforementioned observation by MOFDP, is lack of finance. ESSP points out that there is an estimated funding gap in year 2014/2015 of nearly 1.3 billion Maloti, approximately 130 million USD (MOET, 2005). Perhaps unsurprisingly, ESSP states that GOL will actively encourage the private sector to participate in educational services, though public-private partnerships. This may include cost-sharing and assistance with school fees. This concurs with the thrust of the IFIs to encourage private sector participation in public service delivery.

POLICY TRANSFER

Depending on the respective academic discipline, the term policy transfer is sometimes referred to as policy diffusion, and the nature and extent of such transfer referred to by various authors as "lesson-drawing, "systematical pinching ideas" and "policy band wagoning" (Stone, 2001:4). The essential focus of policy transfer is concerned with who gets what policy (Stone 2004:547), and how.

The conformity in general of Lesotho's education policy to an international education policy agenda reflects an international policy convergence. As discussed above, convergence is also reflected in Lesotho's macro-economic policy (it is also reflected in other spheres, such as health sector reform and HIV and AIDS). In conditions of a weak state that lacks policy-making capacity, there may be considerable pressures for government to "take policy" rather than to "make policy" (Mather, 2001:5-6). Making policy implies substantive participation in policy-making and ownership of such policy. Taking policy implies concurring with policy agendas established by other policy actors and accepting their preferred policy options. Policy convergence reflects successful policy transfer (Dolowitz and Marsh 2000: 21). Stone (2004:564) refers to the "transnationalisation of policy", which should include both the nature of policy content and also the supranational processes involved in shaping content. Policy transfer analysis assists in an understanding of transnationalisation of policy and may be defined thus:

"Policy transfer analysis is a theory of policy development that seeks to make sense of a process or set of processes in which knowledge about institutions, policies or delivery systems at one sector or level of governance is used in the development of institutions, policies or delivery systems at another sector or level of governance" (Evans, 2010:6).

Regarding the transfer of policy content, Dolowitz and Marsh (2000: 13) state, that there are four different gradations, that is: copying, which involves direct and complete transfer; emulation, which involves transfer of the ideas behind the policy; combinations, which involve mixtures of different policies; inspiration, where policy elsewhere may inspire a national policy change. In the case of Lesotho's education policy content expressed in its Poverty Reduction Strategy and ESSP, copying appears to be the primary mode, given its consistency with the international policy agenda and regional policy.

Regarding the processes involved in policy transfer, Dolowitz and Marsh, (1998:38) draw the following distinction between voluntary and coercive transfer:

"Voluntary transfer implies that rational, calculating actors desire a change and actively seek policies to satisfy their needs. Coercive transfer, or conditionality, occurs when policy makers are forced by the actions of outsiders to engage in transfer."

Given that the policy influence of IFIs and other donors often derives from conditionalities attached to ODA (Dolowitz and Marsh, 1998), and given that such conditionalities have arguably played a key role in policy transfer, coercion appears to be the primary process in policy transfer in Lesotho through so-called poverty reduction approaches with little scope for voluntarism. Indeed, Lesotho's Vision 2020 (GOL, 2004a:20) states clearly that donor conditionalities is a "major threat" that Basotho have to contend with.

Weak states in particular may be subject to indirect coercion, as less overtly coercive but often equally effective pressure (Bache and Taylor, 2003). It is unlikely that a hollowed-out state will adopt or formulate policy without regard to financial and other resources. Hence, policies may be designed that deliberately appeal to donors' policy priorities as a magnet to attract resources, without necessarily concurring with their policy priorities. In this regard, there may be little distinction between voluntary transfer and indirect coercion.

However, the penetration of external policy actors that fund key aspects of economic and social sector reform should not necessarily always imply an overly deterministic process, or a one-to-one correspondence between education policy in Lesotho and the agendas of policy hubs for example in Washington, New York, London, Paris or Brussels. In addition to direct or indirect coercion, the policy transfer process may involve more flexible and nebulous forms of influence exerted through policy networks, defined as:

"…the means by which organisations individually and in coalition can project their ideas into policy thinking across states and within global or regional forums", (Stone 2004:560).

Networks represent a mode for the international dissemination of policy paradigms and come in various shapes and sizes. Policy networks may be formal institutions or informal, ad hoc arrangements of policy actors. Booysen and Erasmus, (2001:247) use the term 'policy communities', defined as "relatively small groups of participants with an interest in a specific set of issues". Marsh and Rhodes (1992 in Menahem, 1998:285) suggest that "policy communities" and "issue networks" are aspects of policy networks representing different end points in a continuum. Features of the continuum may vary, for example, with regard to the number of participants, the stability of interaction among members, the ability of members to exclude potential members and the degree of consensus concerning policy goals (Menahem, 1998:285). Stone (2004: 559) uses the term Global Public Policy Networks (GPPNs),which may include or overlap with what are variously termed "global policy advocacy coalitions", "transnational knowledge networks" (Deacon 2008:27) or "epistemic communities" (Dolowitz and Marsh, 1998:44-46). Irrespective of the terminology used, the emphasis on networks, particularly those of a global nature, is that they have an international reach and impact.

Individuals network members, factions within networks or networks as a whole can be construed as "policy entrepreneurs" "who seek to initiate dynamic policy change" (Mintrom, 1997:739). Policy entrepreneurs engage in a variety of strategies to win support for ideas which include "identifying problems, networking in policy circles, shaping the terms of policy debates, and building coalitions" (Mintrom, 1997:739). They may comprise consultancy firms, consultants, think tanks, international foundations, universities and NGOs. Clearly, policy entrepreneurs may be instrumental in both policy development and policy transfer as transfer agents through lobbying and advocacy.

Given the lack of financial resources to fund Lesotho's ESSP, it is perhaps doubtful whether aspects of policy will be implemented in the time-frame envisaged. Dolowitz and Marsh (2000:17) suggest that inappropriate transfer occurs where insufficient attention has been paid to economic, political and social contexts of the "borrowing" country. In Lesotho's case, few would disagree with the content of EFA and the MDGs, but successful and timeous transfer depends on a host of internal and external factors, including the political, bureaucratic and financial resources of the recipient country (Bache and Taylor, 2003:282). In this regard, Lesotho's education policy in a context of aid-dependency and ODA volatility is problematic. The lack of policy fit to indigenous circumstances risks policy failure.

CONCLUSIONS

Limits to national sovereignty of a hollowed-out state, where policy agendas and economic assets are often controlled by IGOs and other supranational bodies as well as foreign commercial interests, reduce Lesotho's room for manoeuvre in producing home-grown policy responses to pressing policy problems. The policy space is dominated by a plethora of national policy problems and competing demands for scarce resources. In this context, the country is particularly malleable under the influence of external policy actors to coercive and perhaps more benign policy transfer in order to attract aid, notwithstanding that all policy actors may not necessarily have the same education policy agendas. Given the weakness of the Lesotho state in public policy-making, it may "take policy", rather than "make policy", often subject to varying degrees of coercion as a result of conditionalities and policy entrepreneurs.

Irrespective of the appropriateness of the policy content and the modalities of policy transfer, the state is virtually relegated to observer status in its own policy development. For over a decade, international agreements regarding management of ODA such as the 2003 Rome Declaration on Harmonisation, the 2005 Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness to provide aid in order to achieve the MDGs by 2015, and the 2011 Busan Partnership for Effective Development Coordination have increasingly emphasised national ownership of development. Ironically, despite these agreements, policy transfer has arguably resulted in the sidelining of Lesotho's ministry of education in policy-making, leaving it to wrestle with implementation issues. The state has withered as a policy actor, although perhaps it never was a substantial policy actor since its birth.

If the case of Lesotho is generaliseable, it suggests that ministries of education in developing countries are often marginalised to the extent that national ownership of policy is undermined. This may result in lack of policy commitment at national level. It may also result in policy failure due to lack of policy fit. Where the role of national ministries of education is relegated to implementation of received policy, resource-availability may be disproportionate to the requirements of any such policy implementation. These aspects may be particularly acute in fragile and conflict-affected states where state-building is premised upon developing national capacity, but where government and other national policy actors may be occluded from effective policy-making processes by the dominance of international policy hubs.

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